

# LGBTQIA+

## Different Colors Through Our Lens

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### Sex, Gender and Gender Identity

AK: Human nature has different spectrums. The gender spectrum is one of them. I have never really resonated with the socially constructed gender binary. Gender is a socially constructed idea of a man or a woman. It is usually taken into consideration as a binary – a man and a woman. But a significant fraction of people – the LGBTQ – are not necessarily fitting into this idea of binary. These people could be your workers, children, best friends or family members, or even dentists. So it is our responsibility to treat people of different colors of the gender spectrum as equal and educate ourselves about this diverse topic. Scientifically speaking, different types of gender are Cis-gender (man or woman), Non-binary, Transgender, Genderqueer, Agender. There could be more, but let's stick to the basics. Sex – It is the biological sex assigned to a person at birth based on their anatomic features. It could be male, female or intersex (having biological features in between of the two). Biological sex does not necessarily align with your gender identity.

Now you may wonder about chromosomes. Biologically, person may have XX or XY sex chromosomes or both. Your external physical features could be fitting into the binary or not. But you're still 100% a human being. Gender identity – Your identity is what you innately feel like. Examples of this could be – a cis gendered man, a non-binary woman, transgender, etc. Your identity plays a major role in your overall health. A person may have to “come out” to you and tell you how they feel. The best way to support someone you know is to listen. Sexual orientation – This term represents your romantic or intimate attraction. Whether you like men or women or both. Different types of orientation are heterosexual (commonly referred to as straight), homosexual (gay or lesbian), bisexual or asexual. Gender expression – It is the self expression in the form of appearance, behavior, mannerisms, art/make up etc.

We are generally taught to fit into a binary of masculinity or femininity. People can have any gender expression they feel comfortable in. A person's gender expression can be both masculine and feminine, in any proportions. SK: I feel that sexuality and gender is fluid. It can change over time. Your sexuality and gender identity and expression is not set in stone. It is because of the conventional gender binary norm that we cannot fully fathom this idea. It all depends on what and how you feel at that point of time in your life. There should be no prejudice in trying to find yourself and experimenting, exploring and experiencing all the different flavours life has to offer to find out what flavour you like the best.

### Thoughts on Section 377

AK: I still remember when the Supreme court decriminalized LGBTQ+ people back in November 2018. It was a celebration after years of oppression. It was a small thing for most people but it gave me a lot of hope for our future.

I think it's very ironic that Britain introduced Section 377 in the laws during British Raj era, but then Britain became one of the first countries to legalize same-sex marriage. Society evolves with time and laws should too. The annual London Pride march is one of the biggest on earth in support of Trans, LGBTQ+ people. These marches show us how a large section of the society have their rights taken from them. I encourage my allies to march with me for our Right to Marriage, Recognition, Right to Adoption and Right to freedom of expression. The way forward is with love. Love is love. In all its colors.

GK: You know that the Section 377 was also against Heterosexual people as much as it was against the people of the community. It illegalised unnatural sexual practices, anything apart from the conventional hetero view of sex. Hence hetero people also benefitted much from the decriminalization of section 377.

SK: Yes, section 377 was also against hetero people as well, but it was not used to target hetero people as much as it was used to target and alienate the people of the community. As such, decriminalization of section 377 was a much more monumental achievement for the people of the community than the cis-hetero community.

### Thoughts on Same Sex Marriage

AK: These days Supreme Court is hearing petitions calling for Same-sex marriage rights. While the central govt is opposing it, activists and lawyers are presenting their arguments in the court. The case is livestreamed on Youtube. It is important to know that relationships, families and marriages are not just a heterosexual privilege.



### Thoughts on Coming Out

SK: In these modern times, coming out is less daunting in the West but for most of the countries in the East, it is still a scary ordeal; hence a pretty big deal. Living your truth to the fullest is still a pipe dream for many. The fear of prejudice and unacceptance from the people closest to them is still one of the major reasons for hiding in the closet.

AK: Coming out is a tough thing at first. But when you do, it's a free feeling. You are allowed to be your REAL self as long as you're living in a democracy. Coming out to your parents may not end well, so it's better to find your safe spaces and be yourself there. March with pride and confidence. Gay people have stood strong in the face of oppression historically and we will never stop. Being gay, the beautiful thing is you get to choose your own family. If people don't accept you, you have a large LGBTQ+ community who will accept and love you. When I first came out to my friends, that I'm a non-binary gay guy, it was very confusing and somewhat awkward as everyone tried to be accepting, as they felt it was the right thing to do, but they were still unclear about the meaning of such words. This kind of ambiguity needs to be dealt with ASAP and people should be educated about the community so as to understand the people of the community and be more accepting. I am still not out to my parents as they have that somewhat typical conservative mindset about the community and I fear that they will not understand and fall back to the classics of parental concern, prejudice and advice-"It's just a phase", "Are you sure?", "You are wrong", "Log kya kehenge", "Bandh darwaze k andar Jo karna hai Karo, par sabke saamne nahi", "Tumne humari naak kaat di sabke saamne", "Parties mein kaise apna muhn dikha", "I know a doctor that can help you with this 'illness'"

GK: I seem to have lived in completely different India. I have grown up very privileged, in a bubble you can say. The people that mattered to me the most, my parents and friends were extremely supportive and I faced no prejudice or discrimination of any sort, be it India or abroad. I think it's all about finding the middle ground specially if their ideology is different. The spirit of compromise is essential for being accepting towards new or different ideologies.

### Dating Scenario in India

AK: Dating, as tough as it is, is difficult as a queer person haha. Online dating never really worked for me and its harder to find dates offline. It's cool with me though. We are taught to not love ourselves unconditionally in this heteronormative society. Hetero or homo, we should learn to love and accept ourselves first.

GK: I feel one of the difficulties faced in the community for online dating, especially in the Indian Subcontinent, is the use of fake profiles and catfishes. People are afraid to show their face and be proud of who they are. They are soo afraid of rejection that they feel the need to adopt overly fake personas. This is not much the case in foreign countries, as I found.

Dr. Gurmeen: I think most people are afraid to use their real pictures and profiles because they are afraid they will meet someone they know on the apps and that will lead to some, if not many awkward and uncomfortable conversations that that person might not be willing to have.

# What do you know about DRAG? Do you know the Historical Significance of DRAG?

**SK:** DRAG is an acronym for Dressing As a Girl. The person dressing up is called a 'Drag Queen' as an homage to the gays owning the word 'queer' and dubbing themselves as 'queens'. It is an artform wherein guys (of any orientation) dress up as girls without any fear of reproach, prejudice, or persecution, and perform; mainly lip-syncing to pop songs and dancing or slaying on the runway in gorgeous and campy dresses. Drag culture is an integral part of the LGBTQIA+ Community and it is being more popularised by the works of DRAG legend Rupaul Charles in his hit reality TV show, 'Rupaul's Drag Race'. He also said one of the most prominent and basic truths, "Love is love is love is love is Love" winning the hearts of everyone in the community and their allies with this simple view of acceptance and inclusivity.

Historically, DRAG was practiced by homosexuals and transgender people mainly in the comfort of their rooms and dive bars. It served as a safe platform for queer people to discover and explore their sexuality and gender without any prejudice and also meet and interact with others from the LGBTQIA+ Community. The significance of Drag culture and drag queens on the LGBTQIA+ Community is paramount. It was a Drag queen that started the 'Stonewall Riots' in the '70s in America, fighting for the rights of gays, lesbians, transgender people, laying the foundation for the equal rights protests and rise in activism for the equal rights for people of the LGBTQIA+ Community.



## loving is easy

### DO YOU THINK THE CURRENT SOCIETY IS MORE INCLUSIVE?

Compared to the previous century, the current society is more inclusive, but there is still a lot to do for the community to be actually called inclusive in its truest sense. You can say that our society is trying to be more inclusive and is slowly inching towards global inclusivity but there are still many pressing issues that are being faced by the community. You can even say the situation is somewhat more precarious as nowadays the prejudice, homophobia, transphobia, identity erasure and ostracisation faced by the community is much more subtle as compared to the 'olden days'; hence much more difficult to suss out and confront it.

### SO, YOU'RE TRYING TO SAY THAT THE SOCIETY IS 'PSEUDOINCLUSIVE'?

No. I will not say that the society is 'pseudoinclusive', per se, but, there is still a whole lot of work to be done for it to be truly inclusive. One main reason, I think for the still prevalent prejudice and reproach faced by the community is that the society at large, is still functioning with an extremely outdated patriarchal and heteronormative mindset, which was taught and propagated by the people in power. The people currently in power at high positions are still people of the Boomer generation and most of them have still not been properly educated or sensitised about the community and their needs. To them, people of the community are still seen as less but it is also completely not their fault as they didn't have the proper resources or knowledge to understand the community. This is the mindset that has to be changed or modified for our society to become truly inclusive.

## DO YOU THINK THE CURRENT SEX EDUCATION PRACTICES ARE RELEVANT AND ADEQUATE?

SK: No. The current sex education practices are obsolete and inadequate. I feel that we as a society are still clinging to archaic norms and beliefs about sex in general, especially in the East. We need to update our beliefs and come in the 21st century. We are still afraid of the word 'Sex' and talking about it. Sex is seen as only the means of reproduction and not as a basic need for people. As such, the topic is surrounded with such an air of misinformation, misunderstanding and fear mixed with a little bit of reverence that people are afraid to talk freely and openly about it. I have even seen younger generation doctors become squeamish and awkward whenever the word sex comes up, even in the context of education. This kind of outlook has to be changed and we as a society have to evolve our way of thinking to the modern times.

## THOUGHTS ON THE MENTAL HEALTH SCENARIO AND NEED FOR THERAPY?

SK: Mental health is very important aspect of health but awareness and dialogue about it and the need and usefulness of therapy is very low, especially in India. We think that therapy is for the weak. Normal people don't require therapy. Getting therapy is a very serious issue. But this is not true at all.

People in the West have given mental health it's rightful due and have placed due importance on the need of therapy. We need to emulate that from the West and practice it here. Specially people of the community are more at risk to develop mental health issues stemming from the fear, prejudice, misinformation, lack of trust and genuine connection that they are generally subjected to.

It is imperative that they are provided with the proper resources or proper channels to avail mental health services. We need to uplift the stigma surrounding mental health and therapy. I, for one, feel that everyone, irrespective of their gender, sex or beliefs requires some amount of therapy during some point in their life.

The premise for this is quite simple- everyone gets a little bit screwed up during their childhood, most of them being sooo insidious that we keep on going on thinking that 'this is fine', but that may lead to other consequences in the future. So, I would request everyone to just go get the help they need without the fear and stigma.

We all obviously go to a doctor when our body is not well; why not do the same for our minds?